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Becoming a writer in the foundation year: Curriculum and pedagogical reform and children's writing. In

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Presentation at AARE National Conference December 2014

SYMPOSIUM TITLE: *Researching teaching and learning to write: Approaches taken to analyzing writing samples and what they tell us about how primary students become writers.*

Chair: Annette Woods

Discussant: Barbara Comber

This symposium reports on the analysis of data collected as part of a five-year school reform project. The ARC Linkage funded research – known as the UReLearning Project - focused on what effective literacy teaching for improved student outcomes in low SES and culturally diverse schools might be. The researchers worked with teachers, students and community members of one mid-sized primary school, in a series of design based experiments focused on renewal of pedagogy and curriculum planning. The whole school collaborative reform project was an opportunity for researchers, the Queensland Teachers' Union, and the leaders, teachers, students and their families and communities to demonstrate what getting the balance right between professionalism and prescription involves.

As part of baseline data on student outcomes, the research team collected writing samples from all students at the school at four time points across consecutive years (2009-2012). This has resulted in a data corpus of more than 2000 writing samples from students in Preparatory to Year 7. The corpus has been rated on a 7 point scale, across 7 dimensions, allowing for comparisons across year levels – children moving from Prep to Year 1 for example - as well as within year levels but across years – children in Year 1 in 2009 to children in Year 1 in 2010 for example.

The corpus also allows analysis of so much more than the development of the writing skills of students in one primary school across a four year period. Not only do the samples provide insight into shifts made to pedagogy by teachers across this time, they are windows into children's literacy learning, their in school and outside school lives, and their imaginings of future lives. Paper 1 uses quantitative and qualitative data to detail the coding process utilised to rate this data corpus. It provides an exemplar of one approach to assessing children's writing over time. Paper 2 presents the quantitative analysis of this data corpus and enables commentary on pedagogical reform and student outcomes. Paper 3 provides an analysis of persuasive texts by Year 6 students to consider what is required for rhetorical persuasion to be a feature of texts produced by these young writers in the future. Finally Paper 4 investigates the samples collected from students in their first year of school across the four-year period to consider the implications of shifting teacher expectations and pedagogical approaches.

Paper 4: Becoming a writer in the foundation year: Curriculum and pedagogical reform and children's writing

Beryl Exley, Annette Woods & Katherine Doyle

As researchers interested in the pursuit of high quality/high equity literacy outcomes, we examine the impact of curriculum and pedagogical reforms on the writing outcomes of children in the first year of school. We draw on case-study data collected in Preparatory classrooms in a school community marked by disadvantage. The data corpus was collected as part of a four-year school reform project that saw the partnership of researchers, the Teachers' Union and the leaders, teachers, students and their families and communities of one primary school. The project involved a collaborative investigation of what reform for improved outcomes of all students might entail. As part of that larger study, writing samples were collected from all students in the school across 2009 to 2012. Here, we specifically focus on the writing samples collected from those students in their first year of school. This data set comprises writing samples for 310 students (27 in 2009, 84 in 2010, 78 in 2011, & 76 in 2012). By considering this analysis in the context of data collected about the reform process in these classrooms, we are able to consider the implications of a focus on literacy pedagogy and high expectations on the development of students' writing in this important learning phase.

To begin the analysis all samples were coded across a 7-point scale on 7 domains including spelling, sentence structure and vocabulary. The analysis enables us to think about shifts across time in the products of pedagogical approaches. A qualitative analysis of selected samples that unpacks the textual and the visual (see Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001) elements of the samples provides a deeper understanding of the literate competencies of these early years students.

Finally, by calling the work of Bernstein (2000), we analyse the pedagogical work of this group of teachers and students. Bernstein discusses the notion of performance and competence models of pedagogy. These models differ on the basis of: categories of discourse, space and time; orientation to evaluation; pedagogic control; pedagogic text; pedagogic autonomy; and pedagogic economy. We use this analytic model to discuss shifts in the pedagogy in these early years classrooms across the reform process and consider what it means for students' literacy outcomes when teachers weave across performance and competence modes.

References:

Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research, Critique* (Rev.ed.). Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

van Leeuwen, T., & Jewitt, C. (2001). *The handbook of visual analysis*. UK: Sage Publications.